



ADEPT

Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Team  
County of Orange Health Care Agency

## YOUTH AND DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (1993, National Center for Health Statistics). In 1996, 3,387 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 373,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

In 1998, 7,975 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes - a 23% decrease from the 10,415 involved in 1988. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 26% between 1988 and 1998. For young males, driver fatalities dropped by 30%, compared with a 14% decrease for young females.

In 1998, 14% (7,975) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (56,543) were 15 to 20 years old, and 16% (1,801,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,368,800) were young drivers.

In 1998, 21% of drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1998, 2% of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 3% of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 21% of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13% and have saved an estimated 18,220 lives since 1975.

For drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1998, 25% of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 12% of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1998, 71% of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 80% were unrestrained.

Zero-tolerance laws for underage drinkers, which make it illegal for persons under 21 to drive after drinking, are effective in reducing underage drinking. All states currently have such laws. Hingson, R, et al. Lowering legal blood alcohol limits for young drivers. *Public Health Reports* 109(6): 739-44, 1994.

Source (unless noted otherwise): National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Dept. of Transportation, Washington D.C., 1998. [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)